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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turmoil in Iraq

All papers report in detail the spiraling sectarian violence threatening Iraq, with the main Sunni alliance, the National Concord Front, declaring a boycott of talks with the Shiite-led government over the reprisal attacks. On Thursday, 168 mosques were attacked across Iraq and 130 were killed, including 10 Sunni imams. Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari proclaimed three days of national mourning. "They are trying to push us into killing one another," the Iraqi government said in a statement. President Talabani said insurgents are out to provoke civil war. Sunni Islamist militant groups, including al-Qaida's branch in Iraq, threatened in a statement on the Internet to retaliate for attacks on Iraqi Sunni Arabs. A Turkish delegation, led by Turkey's special Iraq envoy Oguz Celikkol, went to Baghdad on Thursday to discuss the rising violence and government formation talks. The delegation will meet with Jafari and Sunni and Shiite leaders on Friday. Celikkol is expected to ask the Iraqi leaders to include Sunni representatives in the government, strengthen the federal structure, and postpone the referendum on the status of Kirkuk. The newly-formed Iraqi government will be invited to Ankara. Papers also report that the US has blamed al-Qaida, and Iranian President Ahmadinejad Israel and the US for the attack against the holy Shiite shrine in Samarra.

Almost all editorial commentators expressed serious concern about the future of Iraq and seem to agree that division is imminent as well as inevitable unless steps are taken to change the process. Senior columnist of the tabloid Bugun, Cengiz Candar noted that in the aftermath of the Samarra bombings, efforts to establish a new government have almost come to an end. Expecting a high-intensity civil war between Sunnis and Shiites, Candar wrote: "If this process

cannot be changed, events will lead to the division of Iraq as well as very serious consequences in the Middle East."

Calling the situation in Iraq close to a serious civil war, columnist Ferai Tinc observed in the mass appeal Hurriyet that Iraq is rapidly moving toward division. Tinc believes that if Iraq is dragged into a civil war situation "the whole region will turn into a barrel of explosives," with events leading to more armed conflict, "paving the way for more operational territory for the radical Islamists." Tinc wonders if the process be stopped and concludes "at this point it does not seem so."

Erdal Safak commenting in the mainstream Sabah believes the chaos in Iraq is similar to the last days of Yugoslavia. To Safak, "Sunni areas look like Serbia; Shiite areas Croatia; Baghdad looks like Sarajevo; and northern Iraq is like Slovenia." He predicts that unless something changes, northern Iraq will be the first to detach itself from Baghdad and if that happens "nobody will be able to question the legitimacy of the partition in northern Iraq, considering the fact that Barzani warned months ago he would declare independence once a civil war erupts between Sunnis and Shiites."

EU Warns Turkey over the Greek Vessel Incident
Aksam, Vatan, Milliyet: A Greek Cypriot flagged ship tried to dock in the Turkish port of Mersin the other day without getting permission from the dock Directorate. The directorate did not give permission to the ship in line with Turkish regulations. The incident drew a reaction from the EU, with EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn warning Turkey yesterday to abide by the Customs Union protocol.

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"Turkey has to implement the Ankara Protocol and open its borders and ports to the all EU members. The EU will continue to monitor this and will evaluate the situation in a report in the autumn," Rehn added.

US Congressman Sends a Protest Letter to Turkish PM over Hamas Visit
Aksam, Vatan: US Congressman Tom Lantos, who is well known in Turkey for his efforts to block Armenian genocide bills in the US Congress, reportedly sent a letter to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan protesting the recent Hamas visit. Lantos in his letter described Hamas leader Mashal as the Palestinian equivalent of the jailed PKK leader Ocalan, saying "while your authorities are meeting with Ocalan's equivalent in Palestine, how can you claim moral superiority in the fight against the PKK?" Lantos also stressed in his letter that the meeting damaged the relationship between the US and Turkey.

National Security Council Discusses Iran, Hamas
All papers: Turkey's National Security Council (MGK) discussed Iran's nuclear enrichment activities at a monthly meeting on Thursday. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul briefed the MGK on his telephone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and on Turkish contacts with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna following IAEA decision to refer Iran to the UN Security Council. The MGK believes that a possibility to defuse strains through diplomatic means still exists. Gul also told the meeting that Turkey had conveyed to Hamas the expectations of the international community.

Secretary Rice on Middle East Tour

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Hurriyet, Milliyet, Vatan, Sabah, Zaman, Cumhuriyet and others: Turkish media reports that Secretary Rice paid a surprise visit to Lebanon on Thursday and is returning from Cairo and Riyadh empty-handed, having failed to persuade her counterparts on the Hamas issue. In Beirut Rice will meet with the newly elected Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Saniora,

who defends separation from Syria, but will not see the pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud on this visit.

UN Envoy Demands Reform in Turkish Legislation to Combat Terrorism

Radikal: Martin Scheinin, the UN special rapporteur on human rights and counter terrorism, urged Turkey to redraft its legislation to combat terrorism, describing the present laws as being too vague. Scheinin said yesterday at the end of a week-long visit to Turkey there was the threat of persons not directly involved in acts of terrorism facing prosecution under the present laws, drafted in 1991. "The anti-terror bill, dated to 1991, fails to meet international conventions and falls short of international implementations," Scheinin noted. Turkey has made progress in improving human rights, Scheinin said, adding that establishing an independent body to investigate allegations of human rights abuses and torture was also necessary. Scheinin also said that the government should provide the necessary grounds to assure that Kurds can use their language.

TV Highlights NTV (7 a.m.)

Domestic News

- The parliament approved a bill that will allow Turkey's banned Islamist leader, former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to serve his prison sentence under house arrest.

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Erbakan was convicted for abuse of party funds.

- Twenty-four women have been arrested in Diyarbakir for joining a protest rally in support of the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan.

- Petrol-Is labor union will apply to the European Court of Human Rights if Turkish courts allow the privatization of oil refiner Tupras.

International News

- More than 100 people were killed yesterday in reprisal attacks since the bombing of the Shiites' holy shrine, the Golden Mosque in Samarra in Iraq.

- Denmark will host a conference next month to promote religious dialogue in the face of the row over the Prophet Muhammad cartoons. 138 have been killed in sectarian violence across Nigeria, after protests over the cartoons instigated religious and ethnic tensions.

- Amnesty International strongly criticized the British government in a report which warned that anti-terror legislations have led to serious abuses of human rights.

- The EU warned they would freeze negotiations on Serbia-Montenegro's possible membership in the bloc unless the fugitive Serb General Mladic is delivered to the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

WILSON